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ABSTRACT

Although much attention has been devoted to the study of social competence in the past decade, few researchers have examined the adolescent age group. These two studies examined what behaviors are important for positive peer relations in adolescence. In the first study 1,142 ninth-graders (577 males, M age=14.78; 565 females, M age=14.61) from 7 public junior high schools completed a questionnaire which asked them to select the three same-gender classmates whom they liked the most and the three they liked the least from an attached roster of all same-gender ninth-graders. Students were also asked to write down reasons for each nomination. Cooperativeness, initiation of activities, enjoying jokes, sharing common activities and interests, loyalty, friendliness, and support were all related to positive peer relationships in adolescence. In the second study ninth-graders (N=1,142) from seven public junior high schools completed questionnaires assessing an adolescent's social skills and a student's level of peer acceptance and the presence of reciprocal friendships. Analysis suggested that the behaviors important for having reciprocal friendships are different from those important for overall peer acceptance or popularity. It is possible that the behavioral differences found for reciprocal friendship and social preference in this study represent contextual differences. It will be important for future research to examine the qualitative aspects of interaction patterns over time. (ABL)

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Identification of social behaviors important for adolescent peer acceptance: Implications for social skills training

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Identification of Social Behaviors Important for Adolescent Peer Acceptance: Implications for Social Skills Training

Although much attention has been devoted to the study of social competence in the past decade, few researchers have examined the adolescent age group. Yet, adolescence is characterized by intrapersonal and interpersonal changes which are reflected in friendship structures and relations. Therefore, adolescents may need different skills for the successful management of peer relationships.

Furthermore, if effective social skills training programs are to be designed, it is imperative for researchers to identify critical social behaviors that adolescents need for effective peer functioning. When social skills training programs have been developed and used with adolescent populations, however, their curricula seem to have been derived independently of results from correlational and descriptive studies of behaviors related to peer acceptance. For example, most social skills training studies, that have as their implicit or explicit goal the improvement of adolescents' peer acceptance, focus on conversational and problem-solving skills (see Hansen, Watson-Perczel, Smith, 1989, for a review). Although conversation may provide the mechanism for the establishment of friendships, most evaluations of conversation ability focus primarily on paralinguistic skills such as eye contact and voice tone which have yet to be related to peer acceptance. In fact, previous data (Inderbitzen-Pisaruk & Foster, 1988) indicated that adolescents failed to report that some of the behaviors typically focused on in social skills training programs (e.g., speaking softly and speaking quickly) effected their liking of a same-gender peer performing that behavior. In addition, social skills training programs frequently fail to target negative behaviors although the peer rejection literature delineates various behaviors related to peer disliking.

Thus, the purpose of this paper is to provide information regarding behaviors related to adolescents' peer relations and to discuss the implications of such findings for adolescent social skills training programs. Data from two different studies, each addressing the question of what behaviors are important for positive peer relations in adolescence somewhat differently, will be presented.

Study 1: Reasons for Positive and Negative Peer Nominations

Overview

Researchers frequently identify behaviors related to adolescent peer acceptance through correlational studies (e.g., Coie, Dodge, & Coppotelli, 1982; Parkhurst & Asher, 1987) (i.e., correlate sociometric data with nominations on specific behavioral descriptors). However, the behavioral descriptors are primarily experimenter generated and may not capture the full range of factors important for adolescents' peer relations. Furthermore, although sociometrics are widely used to determine levels of peer acceptance, little attention has been given to the

variables that influence specific sociometric choices (Daniels-Beirness, 1989). This study attempted to overcome this limitation by asking adolescents to list reasons for their specific sociometric nominations.

Subjects

One thousand one hundred forty-two (577 males, M age=14.78; 565 females, M age=14.61) ninth graders from 7 different public junior high schools participated as part of a larger study. Students completed a questionnaire (SFQ) which asked them to select the three same-gender classmates who they liked the most and the three they liked the least from an attached roster of all same-gender ninth graders (with parental permission) in that particular school. Students were also asked to write down reasons for each nomination. Students were not restricted in the number of reasons given for a particular nomination.

Results

A total of 7214 reasons (4105 for positive nominations and 3109 for negative nominations) were generated. Reasons were classified into 32 negative categories (e.g., no reason, group membership, overly-sensitive, conformist/dependent, absence of skills, poor hygiene) and 26 positive categories (e.g., share common activities, even-tempered (not easily upset), risk-taking, physical appearance, intelligence, sense of humor). After categories were determined, the first author and 2 graduate students were trained until an interrater reliability of .80 between pairs of rater was obtained (31.5% of the reasons). Interrater reliability was calculated for a remainder of 30.2% of the reasons and was .95 for positive categories and .92 for negative categories.

Frequency data was used to determine which categories were most commonly used for positive and negative nominations. **Table 1** shows that reasons falling into the categories of companionship, general positive description, emotional support and sense of humor were most commonly given for positive nominations. On the other hand, **Table 2** shows that reasons classified as arrogance, insensitivity, and general negative description were most commonly listed for negative nominations. **Table 3** indicates that males and females may differ somewhat in their reasons for nominating a peer as liked or disliked. For example, both females and males frequently listed reasons classified as companionship and general positive description for their positive nominations. However, a larger percentage of reasons given by females for nominating a peer as liked most were classified as 'emotional support' in comparison to males, whereas a greater number of reasons given by males were classified as 'like the nominee'. In regard to negative nominations, both females and males gave reasons classified as 'arrogance' for nominating a peer as disliked. However, a larger percentage of female's reasons for not liking a peer were classified as 'insensitive' or 'untrustworthy/disloyal' than were males, whereas a greater number of reasons given by males were classified as 'general

negative descriptions'.

Discussion

The results of the present study converges with and supplements the findings from both the peer acceptance and adolescent friendships literatures. Specifically, similar to the present results, previous research has shown that cooperativeness, initiation of activities, enjoying jokes, sharing common activities and interests, loyalty, friendliness, and support are all related to positive peer relationships in adolescence (see Inderbitzen-Pisaruk & Foster, 1990 for a review). However, the present results also suggest that the history and quality of a relationship are important factors to consider. In addition, similar to the present results, previous studies have found that negative peer evaluations are related to verbal and physical aggression, excessive help-seeking, bossiness, showing off, and being a poor sport. The results from the present study also suggest the importance of involvement in norm-violating behaviors such as substance abuse and superficiality for negative nominations.

The gender differences suggested in this study are also concordant with results of previous studies. Specifically, researchers have found that females stress the importance of helping, sharing, and loyalty in peer relationships more than do males (see Asher & Parker, 1989 for a review). Similarly, our results suggest that emotional support is more important in determining females' nominations of liked peers than males' nominations and, conversely, that insensitivity and untrustworthy/disloyal behaviors are more important in determining females' negative nominations than males' nominations.

It is important to point out, similar to previous studies, that reasons given for positive and negative nominations are not just the opposite of one another and highlights the importance of assessing and targeting both positive and negative behaviors for social skills training. Given the differences between the percentages of reasons given by males and females, it appears that different behaviors are associated with liking and disliking for males and females. These gender differences suggest that the behaviors to be included in social skills training programs may need to be different for male and female adolescents. Finally, many of the categories derived in this study reflect global categories (e.g., arrogance, emotional support, superficiality) that require more precise operationalization for assessment and training.

Study 2. Behaviors Associated with Reciprocal Friendships vs. Peer Acceptance

Overview

Within the peer relationship literature, a distinction is frequently made between two social constructs: popularity or overall peer acceptance (most often measured via peer sociometrics) and friendship (most often measured via reciprocal

nominations) (Bukowski & Hoza, 1989). Popularity is viewed as a unilateral construct in which an individual is being evaluated by a group whereas friendship is a bilateral construct which takes place between two individuals in a dyad. As a result of this distinction, group and dyadic interactions with peers are viewed as different experiences that may require different social behaviors for their competent management.

Thus, the purpose of the second study was to determine whether different social behaviors were related to reciprocal friendship and overall peer acceptance.

Subjects

1142 ninth grade students recruited from 7 different public junior high schools participated as part of a large study. Students completed two questionnaires relevant to the purposes of this study: (1) the Teenage Inventory of Social Skills (TISS); a 40-item self-report questionnaire designed to assess an adolescent's social skills and (2) the Sociometric and Friendship Questionnaire (SFQ) which was used to determine a student's level of peer acceptance and the presence of reciprocal friendships. In completing the SFQ, students were required to nominate three liked-most and three liked-least same-gender peers. Standardized social preference scores were calculated based on these nominations using the Coie, et al. (1982) system. Students were also requested to write down the names of all of their friends (restricted to peers in the same grade and school but not gender) and rate each individual listed in terms of likability on a 5-point scale. Adolescents were considered to be reciprocal friends if they had listed each other and rated each other at least a 4 on the 5 point scale.

Results

The first question examined was: Are there different behavior items correlated with overall peer acceptance and dyadic friendship? Three different analyses inform this question. First, simple correlations between scores on each of the 40 behavioral items on the TISS and the number of reciprocal friendships and social preference scores were computed. As can be seen in **Table 4**, 22 of the items were significantly correlated with both number of friendships and social preference scores, 12 items were significantly correlated with number of friendships only, whereas only 4 items were significantly correlated with social preference scores alone. These differences suggest that the behavioral items differentially relate to the constructs of friendship and popularity.

To investigate this question further, a full model multiple regression analysis was computed. The Beta weights generated for each item were then used to compute a new composite variable. The simple correlations between this composite variable and the criterion variables of friendships and social preference scores were examined to determine how well the model for each criterion predicted the other criterion. As can be seen in **Table 4**, when

each model was "crossed", the magnitude of the correlation coefficient significantly decreased indicating that each model did significantly less well at predicting the other criterion.

A second multiple regression analysis using stepwise selection (i.e., representing an 'optimal model') was computed. Composite variables were once again calculated for friendship and social preference scores based on the Beta weights generated for each item selected out in the stepwise regression equation. These composite variables were correlated with both of the criterions (i.e., number of reciprocal friendships and social preference scores) and as can be seen in **Table 4**, the model for friendships did significantly less well in accounting for the variance in social preference scores and vice versa. Taken together, these three analyses suggest that the behaviors important for having reciprocal friendships are different from those important for overall peer acceptance or popularity.

Table 5 lists the behavioral items that are differentially related to friendship and popularity.

Discussion

Furman and Robbins (1985) suggested that there are eight social provisions both given and sought in peer relationships and that are differentially related to friendships versus group peer relations. They suggested that three of the eight (affection, intimacy, and reliable alliance) are more characteristic of close friendships, four (instrumental aid, nurturance, companionship, and enhancement of worth) are likely to be present in both types of peer relationships, and one (sense of inclusion) is received primarily from group or general peer acceptance. The results of this study are somewhat consistent with this idea. For example, sticking up for others, telling the truth, offering to loan clothes, sharing one's lunch, not lying, and not telling others what to do may all be behavioral examples of the social provision reliable alliance which is hypothesized to be more characteristic of friendships than of general peer relations. Likewise, telling others that they are nice and telling others that you do not like the way the look may be positive and negative (respectively) behavioral example of affection and keeping secrets, telling others how really feels, and not making up things to impress another may all be behavioral example of intimacy, both of which are hypothesized to be important characteristics of friendship relationships.

It is also possible that the behavioral differences found for reciprocal friendship and social preference in this study represent contextual differences. That is, perhaps those behavioral items related more to friendship are those that are more likely to be experienced in a dyadic relationship whereas those behaviors related more to social preference are those that are more likely to be witnessed and experienced by the larger peer group.

Nonetheless, the results of this study suggest different social behaviors are associated with friendship versus group peer

acceptance which has important implications for social skills training. Specifically, if one's goal is to enhance an adolescent's popularity the target behaviors selected for training may be different from those which would be selected if the goal was to help the adolescent form at least on meaningful friendship or improve the quality of existing friendships. Further research is needed, however, to more clearly delineate the behavioral differences between the two constructs (i.e., friendship vs. popularity).

Conclusions

Although the results of the three studies presented here provide interesting data regarding social behaviors important for adolescents' peer relationships and suggest directions for social skills training programs, limitations should be noted. First, each study presented utilized verbal report (albeit in a written format) and, thus, questions exist about whether or in what way these behaviors/characteristics are used in adolescents' daily decisions regarding peer interactions/peer acceptability. Also inherent in this approach is the problem with social desirability. For example, in both the first and second study, ratings of liking and reasons provided for nominations may have been restricted by one's desire to respond in a socially desirable manner. Additionally, none of these studies examined context specific information. That is, the impact or importance of any one behavior is probably dependent on the nature of the specific interaction and of the other responses exchanged by partners. Thus, it will be important for future research to examine the qualitative aspects of interaction patterns over time.

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TABLE 1. MOST FREQUENT REASONS GIVEN FOR POSITIVE NOMINATIONS

REASON/CATEGORY TOTAL REASONS (N=4105)	PERCENTAGE OF ALL REASONS GIVEN
COMPANIONSHIP (e.g., fun to be with, we do a lot together, easy to get along with)	19.0 (n=780)
GENERAL POSITIVE DESCRIPTION (e.g., nice, friendly, sweet, cool)	17.7 (n=727)
EMOTIONAL SUPPORT (e.g., good w/advice, understanding, always there for me, good listener)	11.2 (n=459)
SENSE OF HUMOR (e.g., funny, makes me laugh)	10.2 (n=420)
LIKE THE NOMINEE (e.g., have a lot in common, we like the same things)	9.1 (n=373)
HISTORY OF RELATIONSHIP (e.g., best friends since 4 yrs old, known a long time, lives close to me)	6.2 (n=253)
QUALITY OF FRIENDSHIP (e.g., a good friend, a true friend, blood brother)	6.0 (n=246)
TRUSTWORTHY/LOYAL (e.g., keeps secrets, is trustful, sticks up for me)	3.0 (n=124)

TABLE 2. MOST FREQUENT REASONS GIVEN FOR NEGATIVE NOMINATIONS

REASON/CATEGORY TOTAL REASONS (N=3109)	PERCENTAGE OF ALL REASONS GIVEN
ARROGANCE (e.g., thinks is god's gift to world, snob, hotshot, thinks is bad dude)	23.9 (n=743)
INSENSITIVE (e.g., rude, bossy, only thinks of self, puts others down, gives dirty looks)	12.5 (n=390)
GENERAL NEGATIVE DESCRIPTION (e.g., jerk, weird, scummy, leach)	11.1 (n=345)
IRRITATING (e.g., gets on my nerves, plays too much, too nosey, always wants attention)	7.9 (n=246)
NORM-VIOLATING BEHAVIOR (e.g., smokes, abuses substances, thief, lies too much, bully)	6.0 (n=187)
UNTRUSTWORTHY/DISLOYAL (e.g., talks behind your back, two-faced, spreads rumors)	5.6 (n=173)
GENERAL NEGATIVES DIRECTED TOWARD NOMINEE (e.g., she doesn't like me, picks on me, is mean to me)	3.4 (n=107)
SUPERFICIAL (e.g., really fake, is a big flirt, show-off, tries to fit into everybody's group)	3.2 (n=101)

TABLE 3. MOST FREQUENT REASONS GIVEN FOR POSITIVE NOMINATIONS BY GENDER

MALES (# reasons=1860) CATEGORY	%	FEMALES (# reasons=2244) CATEGORY	%
1. COMPANIONSHIP	19.5	GENERAL POSITIVE DESCRIPTION	18.7
2. GENERAL POSITIVE DESCRIPTION	16.5	COMPANIONSHIP	18.6
3. LIKE THE NOMINEE	12.2	EMOTIONAL SUPPORT	17.6
4. SENSE OF HUMOR	12.0	SENSE OF HUMOR	8.8
5. HISTORY OF RELATIONSHIP	7.8	LIKE THE NOMINEE	6.5
6. QUALITY OF FRIENDSHIP	5.8	QUALITY OF FRIENDSHIP	6.2
7. EMOTIONAL SUPPORT	3.4	HISTORY OF RELATIONSHIP	4.8

MOST FREQUENT REASONS GIVEN FOR NEGATIVE NOMINATIONS BY GENDER

MALES (# reasons=1464) CATEGORY	%	FEMALES (# reasons=1644) CATEGORY	%
1. ARROGANCE	19.3	ARROGANCE	27.9
2. GENERAL NEGATIVE DESCRIPTION	19.1	INSENSITIVE	17.5
3. IRRITATING	7.5	IRRITATING	8.3
4. NORM-VIOLATING BEHAVIOR	7.1	UNTRUSTWORTHY/DISLOYAL	8.3
5. INSENSITIVE	7.0	NORM-VIOLATING BEHAVIOR	5.0

TABLE 4. ARE DIFFERENT BEHAVIOR ITEMS CORRELATED WITH OVERALL PEER ACCEPTANCE AND DYADIC FRIENDSHIP?

1) NUMBER OF ITEMS SIGNIFICANTLY CORRELATED WITH NUMBER OF RECIPROCAL FRIENDSHIPS AND SOCIAL PREFERENCE SCORES

BOTH	FRIENDSHIPS ONLY	SOCIAL PREFERENCE ONLY
22	12	4

2) COMPARISON OF FULL MODELS TO PREDICT NUMBER OF RECIPROCAL FRIENDSHIPS AND SOCIAL PREFERENCE SCORE CRITERION VARIABLES

	# OF RECIPROCAL FRIENDSHIPS (n=880)	SOCIAL PREFERENCE (n=1058)
FULL MODEL	.46 (p <.000)	.33 (p <.000)
"CROSSED MODEL"	.22 (p <.000)	.21 (p <.000)
SIGNIFICANCE TEST OF SHRINKAGE	t=8.07 (p <.000)	t=4.17 (p <.000)

3) COMPARISON OF OPTIMAL (STEPWISE SELECTION) MODELS TO PREDICT NUMBER OF RECIPROCAL FRIENDSHIPS AND SOCIAL PREFERENCE SCORE CRITERION VARIABLES

	# OF RECIPROCAL FRIENDSHIPS (n=914)	SOCIAL PREFERENCE (n=1102)
FULL MODEL	.42 (p <.000)	.27 (p <.000)
"CROSSED MODEL"	.05 (p <.08)	.19 (p <.000)
SIGNIFICANCE TEST OF SHRINKAGE	t=9.09 (p <.000)	t=2.07 (p <.025)

TABLE 5. WHAT ARE THE BEHAVIORAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN FRIENDSHIP AND OVERALL PEER ACCEPTANCE?

FRIENDSHIP	SOCIAL PREFERENCE
ASK OTHERS TO GO PLACES[b,c]	FORGET TO RETURN ITEMS[a,b,c]
TALK MORE THAN OTHERS[b,c]	IGNORE STOP REQUESTS[a,b,c]
STICK UP FOR OTHERS[a]	TALK OTHERS INTO THINGS[a,b,c]
TALK ONLY OF OWN INTERESTS[a]	LENDS MONEY WHEN ASKED[b,c]
LIE TO GET OUT OF TROUBLE[a]	THROWS THINGS WHEN MAD[a]
TELLS OTHERS WHAT TO DO[a]	THANKS OTHERS[b]
MAKES-UP THINGS TO IMPRESS[a]	APOLOGIZES[c]
TELLS TRUTH WHEN ANOTHER BEING BLAMED[a]	
OFFERS TO LOAN CLOTHES[a]	
KEEP SECRETS[a]	
TELLS HOW REALLY FEELS[a]	
TELLS OTHERS NOT LIKE WAY LOOK[b]	
TELLS OTHERS ARE NICE[b]	
SHARES LUNCH WHEN ASKED[c]	

a=significantly correlated with this criterion only

b=significant multiple regression weight from full model ($\leq$ .05 for social preference; $\leq$ .15 for friendships)

c=significant predictor in stepwise model